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TAKING RACE OUT OF NEUROSCIENCE TOO

Roberto Cubelli^a and Sergio Della Sala^b

a) Department of Psychology and Cognitive Sciences, University of Trento, Italy

b) Human Cognitive Neuroscience, Psychology, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

"Mal nommer les choses, c'est ajouter au malheur du monde."

(To name things wrongly is to add to the misfortune of the world)

Brice Parain cited by Albert Camus, *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, 1944.

In 2013 the French Parliament barred the term “race” from legislation. President Hollande proposed to drop the term “race” also from the first article of the 1958 French Constitution: “France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic. It guarantees equality before the law for all citizens without distinction of origin, race or religion. It respects all beliefs”. The proposal was opposed with the argument that one cannot change reality or people’s minds simply by changing words. This may be true. However, words do matter (Cubelli and Della Sala, 2017).

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” The term “race” was used here as well. However, the Declaration was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The time is ripe to revisit our lexicon, in science as well as in society at large.

A recent editorial in *Science* (Yudell, Roberts, DeSalle & Tishkoff, 2016) maintained that, given the lack of scientific basis supporting the concept of race (American Association of Physical Anthropologists, 1996; Long & Kittles, 2003; Roberts, 2012), the term “infused with notions of superiority and inferiority” (p. 565) should be banned in favour of alternative terms such as ‘ethnic groups’, “ancestry” or “population”. Yudell et al. (2016) proposed that outlets in Biology and Genetics should consider inviting authors to describe human grouping according to the questions being asked rather than using an imprecise proxy like race, which is wrong and risks of hampering scientific development. However, they admit to the possible

utility of the term in other domains, including social sciences, whereby instead the zeitgeist is also changing (Fujimura, Duster & Rajagopalan, 2008).

We would argue for a more radical ban of the term in all sciences, including ours. The term “race” is still used in Neuropsychology (e.g., Gasquoine, 2009) and in Cognitive Neuroscience (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2013; Feng et al., 2011; Kubota, Banaji & Phelps, 2012). Modern race-based research cannot be tainted with racism, nor can one deny biological differences or genetic variations. Yet we urge authors submitting their papers to *Cortex* to avoid the contentious term “race” and opt instead for better defined biological categories and socio-cultural constructs. This proposal does not spring from reverence to the sanctimony of politically correctness, it is an acknowledgement of the power of words, which should not be neglected also when we write about our science.

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